

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2004

**JOE RODOTA/WEST COUNTY RAIL TO TRAIL EXTENSION:
ADDITIONAL CONSTRUCTION**

File No. 02-024
Project Manager: Maxene Spellman

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Modification of the Conservancy's April 25, 2002 authorization to disburse funds to Sonoma County Regional Parks for the Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail project through: 1) authorization to disburse additional funds up to \$197,000 as an augmentation of the grant, for a total authorization of up to \$447,000 for the project; and 2) revision of the scope of the project to include the construction of a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over Santa Rosa Creek, rather than trail construction on an existing railroad right-of-way overpass, and to include the construction of the remaining segment of the Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail.

LOCATION: Downtown area of the City of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: April 25, 2002 Staff Recommendation

Exhibit 3: Photographs

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31164 of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby modifies the Conservancy's April 25, 2002 authorization to disburse funds to the Sonoma County Regional Parks for the Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail project as follows: 1) authorizes the disbursement of an additional amount not to exceed one hundred ninety-seven thousand dollars (\$197,000) for a total authorization of up to four hundred forty-seven thousand dollars (\$447,000) for the project; and 2) revises the scope of the project to include the construction of a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over Santa Rosa Creek, rather than trail construction on an existing railroad right-of-way overpass, and to include the

construction of the remaining segment of the Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail. This authorization is subject to the same conditions imposed by the April 25, 2002 authorization.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that disbursement of additional funds to construct a pedestrian/bicycle bridge and the remaining portion of the Joe Rodota Trail is consistent with the Conservancy authorization and findings adopted on April 25, 2002, as shown in the staff recommendation for the original authorization attached as Exhibit 2 to this staff recommendation.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would provide additional funds to enable Sonoma County Regional Parks (Regional Parks) to make revisions to the Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail project that received Conservancy authorization on April 25, 2002 (Exhibit 2). The project’s overall conceptual trail alignment and goals have not changed as initially conceived. Additional funding is needed due to necessary design changes and because anticipated private funding is no longer available. The new project consists of 1) a proposed separate pedestrian and bicycle bridge over Santa Rosa Creek in place of an existing railroad right-of-way bridge, and 2) the construction of 300 feet of trail into downtown Santa Rosa. Exhibit 1 shows this proposed end extension of trail as well as the location of the proposed bridge in relationship to the existing railroad right-of-way (labeled “Northwestern Pacific Railroad Corridor”) that is no longer available for trail purposes.

When construction is entirely completed, this project will add one mile of an eight-foot-wide asphalt bicycle path and a four-foot-wide dirt path to the existing Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail now partially completed and built almost entirely in an abandoned railroad right-of-way. The goal of this project is to complete this heavily used, multi-use trail that currently links four communities, including neighborhoods and regional parks. It would end in downtown Santa Rosa, connect to the City of Santa Rosa’s Prince Memorial Greenway, and provide a link from this trail to another leading to the Bay Area Ridge Trail. To date nearly the entire trail, except for a few feet leading up to Santa Rosa Creek plus the 450 feet consisting of the proposed bridge and the last extension of the trail into downtown Santa Rosa, is completed or under construction. The portion under construction will be completed this summer. The design changes differ from the original Conservancy authorization as follows:

Proposed Bridge Instead of the Railroad Right-of-Way Overpass. Originally, an existing railroad right-of-way overpass over Santa Rosa Creek was expected to complete the Conservancy-funded one mile of trail. The abandoned railroad overpass is no longer available because the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit Authority (SMART), the new owner of the overpass right-of-way, is considering adding an active rail line there. Without the use of this overpass it is necessary to build a more costly new bridge to replace this portion of the Trail. Exhibit 3 shows photographs of the proposed bridge site and a depiction of the type of bridge proposed for construction.

Trail Segment into Downtown Santa Rosa. The private developer of a proposed County Human Services Building had agreed to fund the construction of the 300 feet of trail representing the terminus of the Joe Rodota/West County Trail. However, due to State budget cutbacks, the County Board of Supervisors cancelled that proposed project, making the private developer’s

contribution no longer available. Without this expected contribution, additional funds are needed to complete this important extension of the Trail to its terminus in the historic downtown Railroad Square.

Although not part of the request to the Conservancy, two more changes make the proposed amendments workable. In an attempt to successfully implement the proposed revisions, Regional Parks has negotiated with a private property owner for a short trail easement leading up to the bridge and parallel to the railroad right-of-way corridor. The easement is needed because the corridor that originally would have connected to the overpass is also no longer available. In the absence of the corridor this new easement will link the existing trail under construction on the south side of the creek with the newly proposed bridge site. In addition, the City of Santa Rosa has agreed to construct a trail connector ramp from the proposed bridge's terminus on the north side of the creek with the City's Prince Memorial Greenway, thereby creating an intersecting connection of the two popular regional trails. This proposed connector ramp and the existing Prince Memorial Greenway are also shown in Exhibit 1.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy (augmented authorization)	\$197,000
Regional Parks (augmented match)	<u>81,286</u>
Total Project Augmentation:	\$278,286

The Conservancy's contribution of \$197,000 is expected to come from the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program's FY 02/03 appropriation from the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002" (Proposition 40). Under Public Resources Code Section 5096.650(b), Proposition 40 funds may be used for the development of land resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to assist in the development of land-based public access and, as discussed in the section found immediately below, the project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (§ 5096.651). The project is supported by an additional commitment by Regional Parks to provide substantial matching funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164, to address resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Under § 31162(a) the Conservancy may act to improve public access to and around the bay, urban open spaces, and ridgetops by completing regional trail systems that are consistent with locally and regionally adopted master plans and general plans. Section 31162(c) authorizes the Conservancy to assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments. Under § 31162(d), the Conservancy may assist projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational purposes. As required by § 31163(c), the Conservancy is to give priority to projects that support adopted local or regional plans, are multi-jurisdictional or serve a regional constituency, can be implemented in a timely way, and include matching funds.

Consistent with § 31162(a), (c) and (d), the project will connect the existing regional trail system to the City of Santa Rosa and from there to the Bay Area Ridge Trail, and will provide a continuous trail connection from urban neighborhoods to open space and natural areas. The project also serves to implement policies established by the Sonoma County General Plan (Policies 4.1 and 4.2 related to equestrian, hiking, and bicycle trails), the City of Santa Rosa General Plan (Policies TCN 1a, 1b, 1h, and 1m), the 1997 Sonoma County Bikeways Plan (Policies A1-A4 and A12), the City of Santa Rosa Bicycle Master Plan (Policies TCN-1 and 1b of Goals and Objectives 1.4), and the City of Santa Rosa's Southwest Area Plan (Objective 1.2 of Goal CSF-1).

The proposed project satisfies the criteria for determining project priority under § 31163(c) in the following respects: (1) The project is supported by adopted local and regional plans; (2) The trail, including the proposed extension, serves four communities in addition to unincorporated Sonoma County; (3) Trail construction can be completed in a timely manner; and (4) The project includes matching funds from Regional Parks.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objectives B and D**, the proposed project will result in the construction of 450 additional feet of the Joe Rodota/West County regional trail (**B**), and will include wheelchair accessibility and other ADA-compliant elements (**D**).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** This project has strong and longstanding support from the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, Senator Chesbro, Assemblyman Joe Nation, Rails to Trails Conservancy, local schools, the Santa Rosa Cycling Club, and private citizens as shown in Exhibit 2, the original Staff Recommendation for this project.
4. **Location:** This project is located in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, within Sonoma County. This project will expand a regional trail that spans several of the County's jurisdictions and provides a connection to the Bay Area Ridge Trail.
5. **Need:** An abandoned railroad overpass was expected to link the trail on the south side of the Santa Rosa Creek to the north side. This trail connector is no longer available. The Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit Authority (SMART), the new owner of the overpass right-of-way, is no longer willing to grant an easement for the trail because they are considering adding an active rail line there. Without the use of this overpass, Regional Parks needs additional fund-

ing to help cover the costs of constructing a new bridge in place of the overpass, to link the Joe Rodota/West County trail on either side of the creek. Also, the last 300 feet of trail was originally to be financed by a private developer who is no longer part of the project. Conservancy funding is needed to complete this last section, extending into the historic Railroad Square in downtown Santa Rosa.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** This project will expand a significant regional trail, which passes through several Sonoma County jurisdictions, thereby serving a multi-jurisdictional constituency.

Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Innovation:** The proposed bridge and trail segment will be designed to meet all ADA standards allowing access to wheelchair users.
12. **Readiness:** Sonoma County Regional Parks anticipates completing the portion of the trail funded by the Conservancy that leads up to the south bank of the Santa Rosa Creek by this summer. Completion of the bridge and last 300 feet of trail is anticipated by summer 2005.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the “Project History” section in the attached Exhibit 2: Staff Recommendation.
15. **Cooperation:** The success of this project will result from collaboration with the City of Santa Rosa (the City) and cooperation from a private landowner. The City agrees to install a traffic signal and crosswalk to allow pedestrians to cross safely at Dutton Avenue, a busy street that links two completed portions of the Conservancy-funded Joe Rodota/West County Trail. The City will also construct a trail connector ramp from the Prince Memorial Greenway (another regional trail for which the Conservancy provided funding assistance) to the proposed bridge site of the Joe Rodota/West County Trail on the north side of the Santa Rosa Creek. Also, without the use of the railroad corridor leading up to and crossing the creek, another parallel trail alignment is needed to link the soon to be completed segment of the Joe Rodota/West County Trail to the proposed bridge site. The private landowner of property where this new alignment is needed is willing to sell a trail easement to Regional Parks.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The additional aspects of the Joe Rodota/West County Regional Trail project under the proposed authorization are categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Sections 15304(a), (f), and (h), since the activities are in the nature of “minor alterations of land,” as follows:

1. The only grading to be done in connection with the construction of the proposed bridge will occur no closer than five feet from either side of the upper most embankments of the creek.
2. Construction of the bridge will not require placing any structures in or on the banks of the creek, nor will any construction occur on the banks or within five feet of the creek bank. The solid single-piece steel bridge will be lowered over the creek and onto the constructed bridge supports using cranes placed on the adjacent previously developed railroad right-of-way overpass.

3. Construction of the last 300 feet of trail will occur on an already developed right-of-way—a railroad switching area where there is no vegetation.

Construction will occur during the creek's low flow time of the year, and no steelhead or other sensitive animals or plants are known to reside in or around the Santa Rosa Creek where the construction of the bridge and trail will take place. Instead, the project area is in a disturbed urban environment. Further, a recent County survey documented that there are no federally-listed endangered California tiger salamanders in or near the project area.

Upon approval, staff will also file a Notice of Exemption for this project.